

NEWS RELEASE

PRESS OFFICE

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SBA ADMINISTRATOR MAKES FINAL PUSH FOR Y2K READINESS; OFFERS FREE HOTLINE HELP

WASHINGTON – Aida Alvarez, Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), today urged small businesses across the country that have not yet made their computer systems ready for the Y2K computer bug to make a final effort in the remaining week before New Year's Day.

“It is estimated that nearly 70 percent of America's 25 million small businesses have taken care of their Y2K problems already,” Administrator Alvarez said. **“That means there are still a lot of small businesses out there who may or may not have a problem and that's what we're concerned about.”**

SBA's special website for Y2K issues also offers a variety of steps and strategies computer users can take to prepare their systems, including diagnostic check lists and links to hardware and software manufacturers. The website can be found at **www.sba.gov/y2k**.

While SBA's automated Answer Desk is always available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it will be staffed with live operators during the New Year's weekend from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. EST, Friday through Sunday. Beyond those hours, callers can be routed through the SBA system to experts at the National Institute of Standards and Technology who will be manning telephones 24 hours a day throughout the weekend. The SBA Answer Desk can be reached at 1-800-U-ASK-SBA.

Finally, small business owners who need financing help to pay for system readiness actions can use SBA's Y2K *Action* Loan program, even after the transition to the year 2000

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The Y2K *Action* Loan is part of SBA's highly successful guaranteed business loan program, known as the 7(a) program. Y2K *Action* Loans have been available since April to help small businesses upgrade their non-compliant Y2K computers. After Jan.1, SBA will also be able to guarantee loans to small businesses that suffer economic injury as a result of Y2K-related problems despite having taken precautions. Both of these specialized Y2K loans will be available to the public through Dec. 31, 2000.

The SBA began its small business Y2K outreach in early 1998 and to date has held more than 2,300 events nationwide, attracting more than 1.3 million participants. Many of these were developed in cooperation with the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture. SBA, along with Commerce and Agriculture, also created a network of specialized Y2K teams that can provide one-to-one assistance in every state. If your small business needs this kind of immediate support, contact **1-800-MEP-4-MFG.**

For more information on all of SBA's programs for small businesses, call the SBA Answer Desk at 1-800-U-ASK-SBA, or visit the SBA's extensive website at www.sba.gov.

The U.S. Small Business Administration, established in 1953, provides financial, technical and management assistance to help Americans start, run, and grow their businesses. With a portfolio of business loans, loan guarantees and disaster loans worth more than \$45 billion, the SBA is the nation's largest single financial backer of small businesses. Last year, the SBA offered management and technical assistance to more than one million small business owners. The SBA also plays a major role in the government's disaster relief efforts by making low-interest recovery loans to both homeowners and businesses. America's 23 million small businesses employ more than 50 percent of the private workforce, generate more than half of the nation's gross domestic product, and are the principal source of new jobs in the U.S. economy.